

BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Bud Turner: Bud Turner.

Interviewer: You started off before telling me about going to sleep that night and there wasn't a flake of snow.

Bud Turner: That's right.

Interviewer: Why don't we start by telling me that again.

Bud Turner: It was New Years eve, regular night, not any snow at all, dry, went to bed. Next morning, I got up and started to go to work, go out the front door, I couldn't go out the front door. I couldn't open it. The snow was packed completely to the top of the porch. I went out the back door and I had to walk to work. The snow was knee deep then I think. Anyway, I got to work and nobody was down there, no vehicles moving.

Interviewer: What did you do for work?

Bud Turner: I worked for [shay shleinicker 00:00:58] and sons that time. They had dredge and [konniko 00:01:08], both plant. I was running the office. We had about 8 men working there and they finally come straggling in. We didn't do anything that day. I guess of all of them they didn't even show up, [00:01:24] the rest of them we sent home. I've never seen it like that. I've never seen the snow like that. It had a lot of wind with it. Finally walk up town and I remember the golden rule store was 30 ft high anyway, the snow coming down off of that, there was a pathway right next to the building that went clear off into the middle of the street. There were no vehicles, no travel at all [00:02:00]. I remember at [inaudible 00:02:04], the grocery store, people started coming inside with burlap sacks, [inaudible 00:02:11] if they was going to buy groceries, they had to walk in and take them and go home. There weren't too many of them. I can't remember whether it was the next day or a couple days at least.

Then, the national guard got their big truck out that had 4 wheel drive, 4 by 4's. They started trying to clear the streets and making a path anyway, so it had a little traffic after that.

Interviewer: Where did they pile all the snow?

Bud Turner: They didn't mostly start with, they just made a track. They come along with graters later and just move it to the center of the street. A dump truck load of snow didn't go anywhere. They just tried to get a way so that traffic could move, the main thing they did. They had to keep clearing the streets. The snow kept going and blowing and I had never seen anything like it.

Interviewer: Did the wind kept blowing from different directions?

Bud Turner: Well, yes, it did. I took a tank load of gas and fuel out to horn buckle ranch, which is about 45 miles north on Shine River. The horn buckle [inaudible 00:03:47] had needed gas, needed feed, so we followed him. They had a 4 by 4 ahead of me with a load of hay. Bill Robertson took a load of hay out and I followed them. I didn't have any 4 wheel drive [00:04:00] in the tank wagon. It took most of the day to get out there. We got there.

I remember he had a sheep shed. He had sheep. On the north side of the sheep shed, the snow was clear at the top of the roof and sloped down clear out in the yard and the next morning that was all gone. That was clear. The south or the east side, I can't remember, was snow just like on the north side. I've never seen a wind switch around as often. It was a funny snow, real small granulated, hard. There wasn't any flakes to it, kind of like salt. It got hard. It was hard. You could drive on top of it with a full load and then all at once you'd hit a soft spot.

You'd get out and you'd be stuck. You had no idea where the soft spots was. You couldn't tell. We were out there 3 days. 3 days we couldn't get back to town. The [inaudible 00:05:23] Moore company was clearing 1 road at time. They would try to find out what all the ranchers along that road would need and they had a truck follow taking stuff to different ranches. We had walked over to the Reynold's ranch. Horn Buckle had no phones so we walk over to the Reynold's ranch. It was a couple miles away I guess, or 3. Called town to find out when [inaudible 00:05:53] Moore was going to clear the [ross 00:05:54] road. They were going to clear it on a Wednesday.

We left [00:06:00] about 4:00 in the morning to get to the [ross 00:06:06] road. We were about 8 miles from it. We didn't know how much digging and 1 [inaudible 00:06:11] another. I went ahead of the 4 wheel. If I got stuck, he could pull me out. If he got stuck, I couldn't touch him, so I went ahead of him the whole time. I'd be going along and pretty soon I would fall into one of these soft spots and I'd let him get out of the cab. I could hear the chain on the axle clink, clink. He'd pull me out and I'd go off in

another direction until I'd get stuck again or until I'd make it. We finally got to [Ross 00:06:43] road and it hadn't been cleared.

We went down the Ross road. We finally got some big drifts. We finally turn off, went through the sage brush. I got stuck several times. He'd pull me out and we kept going. We found out we got to about [amespokers 00:07:05] and the Cat had broke down. They hadn't gone any farther so we finally got to town about 9 that night from 4:00 in the morning. I've never ever experienced anything like that. I made several trips with the tank wagon. I was supposed to be in the office, but they needed somebody to run it, so I made several trips. We took gas to Bill [walmeen 00:07:38] station. It was right on a [inaudible 00:07:42] highway, but that was blocked up half the time and you'd have to wait for highway dept. To come out and clear it. You couldn't be gone long. I remember I took a load of gas out to Bill and unloaded. The time I got back to the same place, it was full of snow again [00:08:00], so I had to wait until they cleared it again. It just blew in so quick, you can't imagine how quick it blew in.

Interviewer: Were you often stuck in your truck overnight?

Bud Turner: Yes. I spent several nights in that truck. I had a heavy flying suit from when I was in the air force in the service. I had a heavy flying suit I kept in that truck all the time and a box of candy bars. I always left 50 gallons of gas on that truck. I'd meet somebody that needed gas or I didn't want to run out myself. I'd run the heater part of the time at night. Just a safety factor, I always kept gas on the truck.

Interviewer: What was the golden rule? Was it a hardware store?

Bud Turner: It was a clothing store.

Interviewer: Was it a chain of clothing stores in Wyoming or just here in town?

Bud Turner: They had one in Wheatland, but it was owned by a gentle family in town.

Interviewer: I see.

Bud Turner: Right across the street from the [bowling 00:09:12] grocery on center street, that was the side of it. I've never seen the snow like that. You never knew where, one day or the next, where it was going to pile up...

Interviewer: Where are we going with this? What about the food supplies? Was Douglas mostly supplied by train?

Bud Turner: By truck. Mostly by truck.

Interviewer: So, trucks couldn't get in or out.

Bud Turner: No. I don't know how low the grocery stores got on food, but we [00:10:00] didn't feel like we were in any danger at all. Fire department started clearing the highway and some trucks went through and then they'd block up again. They finally got a [inaudible 00:10:18] transportation. Trains were snowed in. We didn't have any trains in here for I don't know how many days. They had crews from Nebraska coming in here to help dig a train out. They [inaudible 00:10:34] the northwestern, northwestern come up from [luskan 00:10:36] and that got snowed in and a cut-down between here and [luskan 00:10:41]. It was almost top of that train. You couldn't see any part of that train when they started digging it out. It had a snowplow on the front, but when it got stuck, that didn't do them any good. They finally dug it out and that took a while. They finally got the train serviced again.

Interviewer: They were digging it out by hand, they were shoveling it.

Bud Turner: Shovel by hand, that's the only way, couldn't get any of that cut and the snow was so deep they just started at the top and had to shovel it out.(laughs)

Interviewer: Douglas, then was pretty much cut off in all directions.

Bud Turner: We were for a few days. You couldn't go any place, nobody could move much except if you had a cat in front of you with a 'dozer that would clear you path some way. I remember when we went out to Horn Buckle's, Dick knew the country pretty well and we weren't on the road very often. He'd take off and get on through a [inaudible 00:11:53] that he knew and he got stuck a couple times, I'd pull him out, but we went back and forth across the road, get to his place [00:12:00] and-

Interviewer: You lived in town here, right?

Bud Turner: Pardon me?

Interviewer: You lived in Douglas in town?

Bud Turner: Yes.

Interviewer: You weren't on a ranch.

Bud Turner: No, no. I lived in Douglas.

Interviewer: So, life got back to normal pretty quickly, or-

Bud Turner: I think that blizzard lasted for over a month, I know, quite a little over a month. It was cold. It was below 0 I think the whole time, considerably below 0 the whole time of the blizzard day and night. It didn't make a difference. When it would blow, you never could see the sun.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of people stranded in Douglas, travelers at hotels and such, do you recall?

Bud Turner: I think they were, yes. I think so. If they were here when it snowed, if they stayed over night, they were stuck. They didn't get anywhere. They couldn't leave. I don't know how long it was before- I wouldn't pay any attention to the highways. I don't know how long it was before they got those cleared. I suppose they'd get them cleared and they'd block in again. The way it drifted, you couldn't see. Your visibility was very limited when you get out, you couldn't see anything. It was the darned-est storm I ever saw.

Interviewer: You must have been just creeping along in your truck, then.

Bud Turner: Oh yes. You couldn't go very fast and if you ever got off the road, pretty soon you'd hit a soft spot. I never left the road on my own because if I got stuck, I was there, but I stayed on the highway and you wait for the highway department to come along and they'd come along and like I say, it'd drift in behind them pretty fast. It was [inaudible 00:14:00] [00:14:00]-

Interviewer: You had chains, but there was no such thing as snow tires back then, or a thing, was there?

Bud Turner: Oh no, I didn't have 4 wheel drive, so we had duals on the back and had a load. You'd use chains. They helped, but I'd get stuck pretty easy.

Interviewer: You say you pretty much stuck to the roads then?

Bud Turner: I had to.

Interviewer: I don't quite understand. The snow was packed on the roads and then you could hit a soft spot on the road?

Bud Turner: I didn't hit the soft spots on the road. It was when I was traveling back from Horn Buckle is when I remember the soft spots that you couldn't tell where they were. You couldn't see anything and everything all looked the same. The sage brush was all covered. Pretty soon you had a spot. You might go for a mile or 2 and travel on top. This was hard, just like concrete. Even with a load you could go on top of it, then you hit a soft spot and down you go. Had no idea why they were soft or why you couldn't tell, so you just shut your eyes and tried to pick out a place to go. (laughs)

Interviewer: When you were traveling across country like that, did you run across any wildlife in distress? Any deer or antelope?

Bud Turner: Very little. I think most of them found refuge in [draws 00:15:38] or cut banks or trees. They lost some wildlife in it and they lost some livestock too, but it was different ranchers lost more than others, just the way the snow packed in.

Interviewer: I've seen pictures of ranch trucks piled high with sheep or cattle frozen solid [00:16:00].

Bud Turner: They drift with the wind and get to their corner of fence, they couldn't go any farther and then they pile up and the snow would drift them under and then the sheep particularly would get one on top of the other and the sheep would be stacked up maybe 6 or 7 high. You couldn't tell. Then the snow drifted in. The cattle would drift into the corners too. They couldn't go any farther because of the fence and so they were stuck.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Bud Turner: No, I just know it seemed like an awful long time that we were snowed in.

Interviewer: Were you doing a lot of shoveling?

Bud Turner: Oh yes, I'll say. It was quite a storm.

Interviewer: Worse than anything else you've experienced since?

Bud Turner: I've never experienced one before or since like that, not ever.

Interviewer: Do you remember what the spring thaw was like when it finally came?

Bud Turner: That wasn't a wet snow. It was granulated like it was salt like I say. There wasn't too much moisture, I don't remember, it didn't flood anybody. When it was gone, there just wasn't that much water in it.

Interviewer: I've talked to some other folks that said static electricity was a problem. Did you have any problems with static electricity?

Bud Turner: With static electricity?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bud Turner: I didn't notice it. I can't remember. It's possible, I don't remember it.

Interviewer: Was radio reception okay? You could hear radio stations okay [inaudible 00:17:53]?

Bud Turner: I don't remember that either. I don't remember about the radio reception. I [00:18:00] was gone most of the time. When I was home I was sleeping, so I don't really remember the radio station. I had no radio in the truck.

Interviewer: You were basically on the go until probably close to the end of February, then.

Bud Turner: Yes, it sure was.

Interviewer: Do you recall seeing any military planes dropping hay?

Bud Turner: Yeah, they had hay drops, dropping hay to livestock. That was quite a sight. They did quite good I think. Of course a lot of the hay was wasted, but some of it got to the livestock. Trouble was, the livestock couldn't hardly get to the hay! That was the biggest problem in most of the drops.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of military vehicles in and around the Douglas area, do you recall?

Bud Turner: No, I don't recall. Mostly just the national guard here with the trucks. They did a good job with what they had. [likely 00:19:09] Moore company did a great job. They had their cats out on the roads, clearing roads. They were very beneficial. Made life easier, those cats going out. They called the ranches when they were going, asked them what they needed and had [inaudible 00:19:38] army truck follow behind them with whatever groceries or whatever these ranchers wanted. They'd leave it. It would be at the road waiting for them or they would leave it for them. The road

they took out, [inaudible 00:19:49] road or the Ross road or whatever road was going on, they'd call them before they headed out and tell them about when they'd be there. It worked pretty good [00:20:00].

Interviewer: So, you were making a lot of oil deliveries then, for ranches that needed heating oil?

Bud Turner: Yes. A lot of them used heating oil then, yes. Heating oil, and then a lot of them were out of gasoline.

Interviewer: Some of them were getting desperate for heating oil, yes?

Bud Turner: Well, some of them were pretty low.

Interviewer: Nobody in any really dire straits?

Bud Turner: No, I don't think so. I don't recall anybody in really dire straits.

Interviewer: Do you recall if there was any fatalities in the Douglas area from the storm?

Bud Turner: No, I can't recall any fatalities. I don't recall any.

Interviewer: I know there were some in the state, but I didn't know if they were-

Bud Turner: I think some sheep herders, the fatalities. They're out with their sheep trying to get their sheep in and they got exhausted and snowed under and so forth. I don't remember any others.

Interviewer: Anything else you can think of?

Bud Turner: Pardon me.

Interviewer: Anything else you can think of? I'm trying to jog your memory here some more.

Bud Turner: No. All I know is it just seemed like everything was white. You didn't see anything but white. It drifted and snowed and was cold at all times, just miserable.

Interviewer: Kind of a featureless white, too. It just blanketed everything.

Bud Turner: Yes. Everything was covered, sage brush and just every place.

Interviewer: Downtown buildings, a lot of the buildings were drifted in.

Bud Turner: Well, they were drifted, but the only one I recall is the one that come off the golden rule. It slanted off from about [inaudible 00:21:51] foot the top and sloughed out to about the middle of the street.

Interviewer: Were cars buried?

Bud Turner: Oh yes, there were cars that were snowed under [00:22:00] that didn't move for quite a while.

Interviewer: For a while they couldn't drive any place anyway. The national guard finally broke a trail, like I say. Then the city got out with their equipment, but it was tough going.

Bud Turner: Did you have any situations where you thought, "God, this is getting a little scary." Were people in fear of what was going on like it was going to get worse?

Interviewer: I'm sure people wondered how long it was going to last, when it was going to be over. They really couldn't do much. These ranchers couldn't do much. They couldn't get out in it, couldn't do any feeding. Like I say, they dropped hay to them and they mostly have to wait until it was over before they could do very much.

Bud Turner: You were never scared on the road or anything?

Interviewer: Not really, I was going to keep warm. Even if I didn't have a heater, I had a heavy flying suit and if I got stuck, I'd just stop til someone would come along.

Bud Turner: It seems to me that people were really prepared back then, especially people like you that had to be on the road and ranchers especially were prepared for this kind of weather.

Interviewer: Ranchers were always prepared for winter. Most of them had a pretty good stock of groceries and stuff. If it lasted as long as it did, they started running out of stuff like fuel oil and they'd run out of gas. They'd run their pickups enough that if they'd run out- they couldn't go very far. They'd get stuck and dig themselves out. They'd run their trucks a lot, but most of them that [00:24:00] needed gas were low before the storm hit. They'd tend to get pretty good supply.

Bud Turner: I don't know, maybe the people that lived in town weren't as prepared as the ranchers, but then they did have grocery stores.

Interviewer: No, but they'd walk to grocery store and I don't think anybody in town, well they did without some things, but they had the necessities I think.

Bud Turner: Good.

Interviewer: It was quite a storm and I hope we never see another one.

Bud Turner: Me too.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Bud Turner: Thank you, Bud.

Interviewer: Yes sir, you're welcome.